

News Release



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State Parks Commission Supports Governor on “Children’s Outdoor Bill of Rights”

Commission Cites Link Between Health Problems and Lack of Outdoor Play

Why is childhood obesity on the rise? Why are children starting to have heart problems? Why are more and more children showing signs of stress and mental illness?

The answers to these questions are found in new research that shows today’s youngest generation is bound to electronic gadgets and aren’t getting exercise from outdoor activities.

To lend their support in countering the trend, the California State Park and Recreation Commission today unanimously passed a resolution to join Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger in his efforts to promote the “California Children’s Outdoor Bill of Rights.” The Bill of Rights was created by the California Roundtable on Recreation, Parks and Tourism, a diverse organization that includes membership from the outdoor recreation industries, user groups, environmental organizations, academia, and recreation providers from the federal, state and local levels.

“There is a lot of evidence is beginning to mount that the simple effort of having children spend more time outdoors in nature counters many of the ill affects that many of today’s kids experience ,” said State Parks Commission Chairman Bobby Shriver. “Exercise from outdoor play and being in natural areas of quiet and solitude lower the mental stresses of modern day living.”

The Parks Commission hopes the resolution will urge parents to spend more time outside with their children in order reduce childhood obesity, high blood pressure, heart problems, stress, attention-deficit disorders and other health and psychological problems affecting youth.

In his book “Last Child in the Woods – Saving our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder,” Richard Louv cites study after study concerning ailments today’s children experience. Those studies, as Louv points out, also make it clear that outdoor exercise and exploration of natural environments counter the ill affects that children suffer from being increasingly under house arrest.

“Kids used to spend the bulk of their time outdoors in free play, wandering the neighborhoods, a local stream or a vacant lot,” said Clint Eastwood, Vice-Chairman of the State Park and Recreation Commission. “Today, we’re worried about stranger-danger and we pile on

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the homework, plop them in front of screens and turn them into couch potatoes. We should not be surprised that their physical and mental health are also plopped on that couch and going nowhere.”

In passing the resolution, the Commission establishes California State Parks as the first State agency to endorse the Governor’s Children’s Bill of Rights Proclamation. The Bill of Rights provides that every child between the ages of four and fourteen should have the opportunity to:

1. Discover California's past
2. Splash in the water
3. Play in a safe place
4. Camp under the stars
5. Explore nature
6. Learn to swim
7. Play on a team
8. Follow a trail
9. Catch a fish
10. Celebrate their heritage

“I would urge parents to examine the lifestyles of their children and find ways to increase their outdoor play activities in order to improve their physical and mental well-being,” said Ruth Coleman, Director of California State Parks. “Visiting a state park is a great way to start.”

In Louv’s book, we find the following information:

- The Center for Disease Control (CDC) reports that the U.S. population of overweight children between ages two and five increased by almost 36 percent from 1989 to 1999.
- A 2003 survey, published in the journal *Psychiatric Services*, found the rate at which American children are prescribed antidepressants almost doubled in five years; the steepest increase--66 percent--was among preschool children.
- Cornell University environmental psychologists reported in 2003 that a room with a view of nature can help protect children against stress and that nature in or around the home appears to be a significant factor in protecting the psychological well-being of children in rural areas.
- Many parents notice significant changes in their hyperactive child’s behavior when they hike in mountains or enjoy other nature-oriented outings.

In a report entitled “Children’s Outdoor Play & Learning Environments: Returning to Nature” by Randy White and Vicki Stoecklin, published in the March/April 1998 issue of *Early Childhood News* magazine, the following information was presented:

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- Studies have provided convincing evidence that the way people feel in pleasing natural environments improves recall of information, creative problem solving, and creativity.
- Early experiences with the natural world have been positively linked with the development of imagination and the sense of wonder.
- When children play in nature they are more likely to have positive feelings about each other and their surroundings.
- Outdoor environments are important to children's development of independence and autonomy.

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